Interview with Captain Percival Prescott-Richardson
Conducted by Dr. James L. Dodson and
Miss Melanie Rothschild
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TAPE #1 - SIDE 1 & 2

DODSON: I wonder sir if we could start off by you giving us your full name and perhaps telling then what year you came into southern California and exactly why.

PRESCOTT: I came to southern California in 1929. My name is Captain Prescott Richardson. I came from England in 1923. I spent 6 years in New York. Working in and around and with and for different ? of the then silent movie times. I came to California in 1929 and naturally took residence down in Hollywood where the interest in the movie industry was then at its heights. It wasn't so much the fact that I wanted to get into the movies, as it was that my wife had got quite a following and had got quite a name as an international dramatic character artist and with contacts and contracts that she had already made we decided that Hollywood was the best place to use those contracts out. So in 1929 we arrived in Hollywood and we run into different difficulties as we got into residences. In fact, we had quite a little trouble because at this time the state had developed the loans on houses whereby people could build a National Rent Act or something went in and I

had a fight with my landlord who wanted to kill a lease that we got two years to run and the time arrived when the lease ended. That meant we had to get out and do something as to a residence and my wife happened to mention to a real estate man that we wanted to get out into the valley somewhere or at least get out somewhere where we could have a garden and a little plot, no matter kind of a wreck the situation was. Well, while it was a joke at the time because what we had to offer financially and what have you, in my mind, was the thing that would save us because I didn't want to go out there. At all events, it went it just so happened that the events happened like they do sometime if you just hit the iron at the right time and strange as it seems it was only about two days after my wife had mentioned this fact that the real estate man came back and I said, "I think I've got just the place that you want." Well, he took my wife out to see it and it happened to be on Ventura Canyon Avenue and it happened to be looked like a squatter's cottage. It really was nothing of a house at all. But that didn't take my wife from falling in love with the place because it had about 26 trees on the property. It had apples, plums, peaches, walnuts, you name it, it was all there. And it was just in the season when the fruit was there and the blossoms were like, it was like a

small park. And that was it, my wife wanted that piece of property. Well, they finally took me out to look at it but I was just aghast at the whole thing. It was the house that got one line of illumination like a railroad car with a light hanging down and it was a plain eye sore. In fact, it was everything that it shouldn't be. But the real estate man he thought he saw a sale and they offered it to me at a price but I said, "I haven't got any money for that." So he came down to an idiotic price which I had to argue with him about. And I thought, well I could get out of that by telling him I didn't have enough finances to pay for the darn thing. Anyway we got down to the situation whereby they almost gave the place to me. And the rent was only a few dollars a month and I think the price that I gave for the whole property was $2,800. Well, we finally landed into the place and soon after we got there we found out what we'd got. I was taking a bath one day and the bath slipped through a rotten floor. Broke all the pipes and everything and there I hung onto sides yelling for my wife to pull me out. The grand piano we had, why it went through the floor. So we packed it all up with automobile number plates to substantiate it but we stayed in that house and we renovated it made it quite a nice comfy little place and we stayed for about 13 years. During all this

time we were continually besieged by real estate men who wanted to buy it. They wanted the property for all kinds of reasons and we didn't want to move. After all events then roundabout 1953 we were so pestered with these people who wanted to buy the property I said to my wife, "The next man that comes along, tell him yes, they can have it for $25,000." And this was on a Friday night. On Saturday the real estate man came and said, "Do you want to sell this house for $25,000." And I said, "Why sure." I thought the man was nuts. Well, we'd lived it for 13 years and no rent we paid on that. We paid it up years before. We liked the place and that's why I said $25,000. It sounded absurd. You will not believe it but that house was sold within 24 hours. After I said $25,000 the next thing he said as we were going up to the old Ralph's store on Ventura Blvd. on a Saturday morning, he said, "Come in and sign the papers for $25,000 and we'll see what happens." And believe it again, we returned from Ralph's during our shopping and he called us over and he said, "I've sold your house." Well, that realty, well what could you say. At all events we signed up and they gave us three months to get out of the place. They started to pull it down before we got out and we finally found a place over on Valleyheart Drive. Actually what it was, was this real estate

man had got a proposition whereby he sold to an investor the property and the plans and the financing to build units on the property and to this day I could never understand why I didn't buy the lot next store for $5,000 which I could have done at the time. All I need like everybody else if I had the money I would have done it. This piece of property that we had now has 10 units on it. And they are apparently all occupied and if you walk on Ventura Canyon Avenue any day I can only say I'm happy I don't live there now because one automobile almost tapped inside the doors of another. The whole street is jammed. At all events that was the start off of things changing for us. Because the house that we visited was owned by somebody was doing the same thing that we did. They didn't want to move and they put what they called a foolish price on it. And at the moment I think it was they wanted $28,000 for the house. At all events, we decided to take it. And so we had the house on Ventura Canyon Avenue and lived in it for awhile until the next door neighbor with whom I was quite friendly had to move because he had got a position way out of town and he wanted me to buy the house which I couldn't do. But fate said otherwise. They said, "Well now you've got the house here..." which was 13640, they said, "If we can refinance that house for you, will you take the other one." Well

the loan company gave me more on the loan than I actually had on my first purchase. So now I had two houses from the results of the little cottage over on Ventura Canyon Avenue. So, with that change along the line we have watched the different houses on the old street, Ventura Canyon Avenue disappear one by one at prices that were phenomenal just because we started off by selling the first one. Now the street is completely jammed with units and we're happy now where we are in the second house that we purchased with a very good tenant in the first one. So no matter how much you try to change conditions that you think exist, fate will take a hand and make you do things that you don't want to and it comes out fine in the end. So we now have been here on Valleyheart Drive and we have watched the different changes that have gone on to change a country location into a booming commercial and general residential section. What would be the next thing, who can tell when you look back on what has happened and they tell me today that the house that I'm living in now can be sold for $50,000.

DODSON: Can you tell us something about the sort of wild life that you said existed in the valley when you first moved in.

PRESCOTT: When we first got into Ventura Canyon Avenue it was actually a park. It had beside all the fruit trees and one of those beautiful weeping willow trees in the same garden. And at night we knew there was a lot of life around because if you like skunks, all you had to do was to come out in the garden there at night. We had skunks and we had a possum. And the possum would hang on the fence there as dead as they say "as dead as a possum." We also had visits from a few little stray rattle snakes. One crept into the back porch one day and we thought it was a lizard. Also we had a number of birds that you never see and as I mentioned once before on some other recording, just around the corner from us was a little bundle of forestry in which some deer had taken up their home. The automobile apparently decimated those because I personally saw an automobile on Woodman Avenue hit one day. Then of course when they pulled all of the property down there and took the church away that was there and pulled down the little drive-ins there to build that huge clubhouse that they have, all that changed and we very rarely see anything in the way of animal life now, except in the 300 or 400 pigeons that were resting on the telephone and high tension wire two houses away where they feed them. If anybody wants pigeon pie, all they have to do is come down there, they could get as many as they want.

DODSON: Can you tell us what's your first impressions of the valley were. Did it look like a rural area or was it built up?

PRESCOTT: My first impression of the valley was something that I didn't want. First of all I had to drive over that Ventura Canyon...the Cahuenga Pass onto Ventura Blvd., which was a task for anybody at that time. Especially in the winter. Then in the winter itself, water was the problem then. There was no shortage of water anywhere. We had floods from the north and floods from the east. We had floods when the damn couldn't be closed, it flooded right down, killing many dogs. Killing lots of animals. In fact, it was never thoroughly publicized but quite a number of drowning deaths occurred as the water swept down into what was the old Los Angeles River. The Los Angeles River itself was a real river, muddy, got all kinds of craw fish in it, bull rushes, a real country river. It belonged out in the country and that's what the country was then. If you took a drive out on Ventura Blvd. it was only a short run before you were in terrific orange and walnut groves for miles and miles and miles. And talking of smog of today, it actually has no comparison to the smog that was then when they had to turn on all of the...light up all of the smudge pots in the orange groves to

prevent them from freezing. Then you really got a cloud of smog. Now, we may not have the smog from the orange trees but we don't have the orange trees either.

MELANIE: I was wondering what type of markets you went to. You mentioned a Ralph's market. Were any of the chain markets around or were they mostly private businesses?

PRESCOTT: No, we did have a Ralph's market out here on the same location that the huge Ralph's market today stands on. It wasn't a small market but it was the only one around except one or two small ones that existed down in Universal City. But Ralph's was the one that most people went to. Except the one or two small stores on the 13000 block of Ventura Blvd. So that was the only place and it was quite a task when they decided to pull the Ralph's building down and build what was then the biggest Ralph's store that they had.

MELANIE: How far apart were your neighbors? How close were your nearest neighbors when you first moved here?

PRESCOTT: The nearest neighbors when we first moved in were you might say in the next lot. Because they were small one unit houses. But there were a number of vacant

lots there and that's what I meant when I said if only I had the money, I'd be a millionaire today because of the cheap price that I could have purchased those lots for. But it has to be remembered that this happens to everybody. There were times when Woodman hills looked like the front set of a movie set with a lot of artificial stores there. Most of them had been built up on a real estate development in earlier dates but for some reason or other it didn't take. And I had offers more than once of buying a whole acre with a little place on it for as low as $100. Boy, if I'd only had $500 I wouldn't have to do anything today.

MELANIE: How about your social life? Were there restaurants or movie houses or theaters nearby in the valley?

PRESCOTT: Our social life was mostly home life. There was one movie house and later there was a radio store on the 13000 block on the Ventura Blvd. that drew its own clientele because they had one of the earliest television sets placed so that the public can stand on the sidewalk and look. You'd believe it or not the greatest attraction there was on a Wednesday when they had the wrestling down at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles and there would be dozens of people there watching the wrestling on the sidewalk this is.

Well, must admit that I did it too, until my wife told me I was a pill? or something for watching people knocking themselves out and what have you until I caught her watching wrestling herself when we bought a set.

DODSON: I'd like to come back to something else, the smudging. Can you tell us what it was like when the smudging was going on in the valley? Was it difficult to breathe, did it get your house messed up? What are your impressions of the effect of smudging?

PRESCOTT: Well, the orange smudging that they did was done by a special kind of container that burned heavy oil and gave off a heavy smoke. And apparently that smoke congealed on the orange trees as sort of a protection against the frost. It wasn't so much big plowed expanding smudge in the air, it was a heavy smudge and if you were in it long, the nearest I can tell you, is it was the same as being in London in the earlier days when they use to have the old chemical fogs which were really thick. And that is the nearest approach that I can say except that the smudging did not seem to effect your breathing in any way at all. Although you could get some pretty dirty faces if you stayed around in there long.

DODSON: The feeling is then that it didn't spread throughout the valley. It wasn't really a problem to people not living close to an orange grove.

PRESCOTT: No, it was very much localized, it was so heavy. And of course if there was a heavy wind, the wind also dissipated the frost to a great extent. But other than that, it was pretty much a localized effect unless you walked out into it yourself. And as I say, you had to go out on the boulevard and with the groves as they were, very few of them were actually in a residential area.

DODSON: Now you came to the valley at the time that we were having our Great Depression. 1929 to '33 particularly...what are your impressions of the effect of the depression in the valley?

PRESCOTT: Not having being in the valley prior to the depression, I naturally assumed that things as they were then were the normal living conditions in the valley. Unemployment and things of that type were something that wasn't publicized to the extent that it is now and I don't think that if too many people were actually employed in the valley itself because the industry hadn't developed here and it was just local inhabitants who had lived here prior to that

time. So that any of depression effects would only have been felt by the extra cost of living which I have no way of comparing because the way I was living at the time was along the same class of development that I had when I came out with Hollywood proper. Naturally, finances were not too great at any time along that line because the movie industry that I was comparatively interested in had its ups and downs with the lack of work or strikes, sometimes fires. So that my impression of the depression is depressing.

MELANIE: In the time that you were here then can you narrow it down or mention one thing that seemed to have changed the valley in your eyes?

PRESCOTT: Well as far as my local development is concerned, the only thing that I can say that has changed the valley more than anything else is the Bullock complex. It has developed residences to which were small while they were developing because prior to that it was a school situation more than anything else. And the school was the McKinley Home way up on the hill, which in itself was like being out in the country and it wasn't until that was sold and the hill cut down to ground level and Bullock's started to put in their big complex that people began to flock out here. The

situation is exactly the same further out in the valley until the big shopping complexes out in Tijunga started off, nobody went out there to live. Now that you go out there, there's residences, there's commercial houses, with the freeway there's direct communication for trade development. But it is the big stores that would actually brought about the developments of a locale. Bullock's at the present time now is my understanding that are interested in an area that extends many blocks on either side of that building and I have also heard, without too much authority, that they have purchased much territory on which private houses are standing today and in which they an eye to investment for future. Especially when you look even now at the new buildings that are going up directly on the other side of street from Bullock's while they have these...what the heck do they call them...condominiums which were less than a year ago, all single residences.

DODSON: Can you tell us what you did during World War II? You were living here in the valley at the time.

PRESCOTT: Well, I did a number of things during World War II. First of all, I became a special policeman. Going out with the police, checking on lights and checking

on wartime activities that were supposedly taking place here in regards to light signalling and also the traffic going over the hill with the headlights and things of that sort. It sounded as though it was an important event but there was a number of incidences where the auxiliary policemen, which I was one of, really did a great deal of good by doubling the police force, going out with the police and even doing such mediocre things as listening to complaints of people who had gone into restaurants thinking for a good time without looking at their costs and then complaining about what they had to pay. Ventura Blvd. had a number of restaurants along the line which people from Hollywood would come out for an evening's fun and then without looking at the menu, scream their heads off when they found out that all their week's pocket money had gone in that one meal. And they'd call the police and what could we do. We told them that they went out for atmosphere, they didn't look at the bills, what could they expect but pay up. There was nothing they could do about it in anyway at all. Of course, that caused some trouble. It also caused some restaurants to get bad names. As far as I'm concerned I can see quite well. If I go out into a place where I didn't know where I'm going and who I'm going to meet I had to put up with what I get and that's exactly what we told them. In

addition to that, my activities still hang around to some extent with the production of radio and general like in interests. I also was very interested in what was then the uranium rage. Everybody wanting to go out and make a fortune by finding a chunk of uranium which they thought they could do on a Saturday night trip. And it's amazing how many people who really couldn't afford it, would spend hundreds of dollars for an instrument and then head for hills without realizing that 500 people was already been over those same hills. And of course they got nothing. The uranium situation was one that came up like a storm... I think it was $10,000 for a discovery of a location in which uranium could be mined. I did meet several people who made thousands of dollars, but they went far afield to discover the bed before they could do anything about it. Whereas other people found a uranium deposit in one unit that made them rich for the rest of their life. Given an instance of a man who was way out in the wilds and discovered a petrified, now I shouldn't say petrified, but a semi-fossilized tree, a huge tree which in some way had become completely impregnated with secondary uranium. It's called ?promitrite. I think for that one tree he got about $20,000 from the location to which he had to transport that tree. But as far as the uranium business was concerned, as many

people who made a fortune so did just as many lose a fortune. The company that I was with had instruments that cost hundreds of dollars a piece which you couldn't sell for ten cents. And in transportation, accidentally or otherwise, I know that many hundred gigacounters were in some way or other caught in a big warehouse fire and burned. And they were insured. So as far as that end of my interests are concerned, my life in radiation ended after my valley recordings of uranium and the fallout interests were sent to the Atomic Energy Commission by myself for their investigation and their acceptance of my findings and their comments to myself for having done what they called, "A pretty good job."

DODSON: I'm curious to know whether you felt that there were many scarcities of products in the valley. Now you were in England during World War I and you're in a little good station to compare. Was the situation here very easy in comparison with England in World War I?

PRESCOTT: Well there was absolutely no comparison. Here there wasn't a shortage so much of commodities as there was the elevation in prices. If you had the money, you could buy anything here. But in England you had to have a ration ticket for almost every time you went

to bathroom. You were rationed for butter; you were rationed milk; you were rationed for meat. And rationed for eggs, groceries. And you had to have your ration tickets before you could purchase this stuff. And this was general all over England. Here the commodities and the food was here if you had the money to buy it. And in World War II the situation reached a position in England very much the same as it was in World War I but here they were now sending out care packages from here which were even going to England and you were allowed to ship to England parcels of 24 lb. a piece. So that my interests in England were pretty much supplied with things they couldn't buy by the parcels that I shipped them from California. But here the only thing that we really had any trouble with was the gasoline and the gasoline tickets were a joke. Because you could buy gasoline anywhere you wanted it if you knew where to go. And in addition to that, there were forgeries on the market which the different stations accepted and it wouldn't have been so bad if they didn't suddenly stopped the rationing of gasoline as they need and make no attempt to check up actually on the sales that were taken place at the gas stations on which there was no balance. Nobody got a total of what was what and this was in the gasoline situation only. Here in this country we were very much rationed for

metals, steel, copper and everything of that sort. And I was in a position whereby we had to keep great logs of what metals we bought, what metals we sold, where we turned the metals out, what we made out of them. Even for material made for the government. And it so happened that I was scared to death that the senior member of the company that I was with completely ignored all government regulations. He got his steel where he wanted it, he used it for he wanted it, he put it into government material that he manufactured. We kept us what was suppose to be a log but when the war ended so did everything we got in that rationing our metal that we taken so much or suppose to have so much care to have made a record of, not a check, not anything. And the boss man had a good laugh at our expense.

DODSON: I'm really interested to know what effect earthquakes have had on you since you came from a country where the earthquake is pretty much unusual, if not practically unknown and then you got here and felt them. What impression did you get of them?

PRESCOTT: Well, I got a great deal of respect for earthquakes. I was down in the lower regions of the Rowan Building in Los Angeles when the Long Beach Earthquake hit it was like being aboard a ship, the passageways and

everything rocked just as though you were on a high ocean. The lights and all the pipes and tubes and everything that were down there rattled like a lot of castanets. You couldn't keep your footing. You didn't know what it was. I suspected it was an earthquake. I didn't know of anybody being able to push it like that. In all events, I was scared to death of the whole thing because it was the first time I'd ever had an earthquake experience. I'd been blown up and knocked up and bombed up and everything else but this was the first time I had an earthquake. I got myself together a bit after realizing what it was and I went up on ground level and I looked outside at all the shattered windows along Spring Street and thought, "Well, I suppose I got to take things as they come." I didn't see anybody that was hurt there and I went about what I was suppose to do which included going up to the top of a building where the controls for the elevators and all the machinery was up there. That is when that darn earthquake hit a second time. I nearly went out the window of the 12th floor building, at the Rowan Building and I didn't...there was only a catwalk. I don't know how I didn't get out that window. Now I didn't know whether to go upstairs, downstairs, stop where I was or what. At all events, everything passes and I went home. I didn't see too much damage

anywhere but with the exception of broken glasses. And we got a lot of forestry reports about what had happened at Long Beach. One person said there were whole schools full of dead bodies and when the news came out that there was only a few people hurt. But when I went down into Long Beach I saw a lot of houses that were completely twisted off their foundations. Where their front door north it now faced east or something like that. So that as far as the press and as far the reports are concerned I have never learned the truth of that earthquake. But I've gone through a number of small shakes since and we've had earthquakes. We had a Sylmar Earthquake a short while back. That rocked the house pretty well. And our house next door, the chimney decided it was going to fall down with it stuck half way. So we had to have that shored up but that is about the only damage that we had to the house. And of course, no earthquake insurance and since then we've had a number of small tremors and I've come to the conclusion that all this talk about the big fault is a lot scary publicity because the big fault hasn't let go and Turkey and the European countries that never had earthquakes have been completely wrecked. So what country are you going to go to for comfort?

DODSON: So your not worried then about the Palmdale bulge and the possibility of another big quake in California?

PRESCOTT: Well, I don't say I'm not worried but I do say this, that geologically I realize that the earth wearing out. I realize the lack of pressure in the interior of the earth. I realize how much oil, how much gas, how much water is not where it use to be. And I know that if you take the supports away from anything, it's going to collapse. How much it's going to collapse who can tell. They say that the continents, the plates as the continents called is sliding, miniature measurements each year. But it doesn't take long for a small slide to set off an avalanche and when you look at the news that we get and realize that the pressure is all reflecting to the weakest part of the earth, which is the Japanese islands, which has the worst volcanic situation in any other part of the world, who's going to tell me that this good old earth that we're on won't split in two like an orange and wheel into space in a fraction of a minute, drop into the sun, and it wouldn't matter whether you smoke or not, you're gone, why worry about it.

DODSON: Now when you came from England, England had no minority troubles I believe. Have you been conscious

of minority troubles here in the valley of tensions between races and that sort of thing since you got here?

PRESCOTT: As far as racial conditions are concerned, I don't think that anybody can make a comment on that unless they belong to one of the parties against which there is some form of either contempt or dislike. If your in your own circle the only time that you realize what actually is happening is what paper you read...what politics that paper has and what they are going to tell you about the people at the paper the editor doesn't like. You cannot take for gospel anything that you read in the newspaper because somebody else is telling you and they're telling you for their benefit, racial or otherwise. So as far as I'm concerned...there's an old old saying, "I try to keep my nose clean."

DODSON: Sometimes were told that southern California has been the scene of lots fads of one kind or another. Do you feel that our populous here is less stable than the populous in England?

PRESCOTT: That is a situation that takes an awful lot of comparing. In England they're compressed. England is a very small place. Here you have states that can

contain two or three Englands. You have situations here where this present generation is going miles away. By that I mean they make a weekend trip of 1,000 miles so that they see the world. They see what they live in. In England during the time I was there especially there are entire families who have never been more than 60 miles away from their home even though they live in the town. I have brothers and sisters over there that have never been anywhere further than what they called the seaside, 40 or 50 miles away. They have no opportunity to judge or anything of that sort. And when they do, if they could, if they did, they wouldn't be able to make a comparison any more than I could make a comparison when I figure on the returning from a trip less than three months ago in Germany that I saw a race of people there bent on pleasure, handsome, prime, living up to everything they wanted to do absolutely without any aspect of the results of the war, of the two wars, living absolutely free in their own way to such an extent that you admire them. You could not but admire. Berlin when I was there was full of visitors, full of happy people and if Hitler was alive today he would be so proud of himself, because the present generation of Germans are the most handsome, the tallest and fairest people you could hope to meet.

DODSON: What do you think about morality at the present time as compared with the situation when you first came into the valley?

PRESCOTT: Well, when you speak of morality I surmise you're hinting along the line of what do I think of sex.

DODSON: Yes, it could be sex or crime or narcotics, all of these things I suppose figure into it.

PRESCOTT: Well, the present generation can never be the previous generation or the next generation. It is itself and the conditions under which they are living, especially the younger generation are such that there is absolutely no way of offsetting what is without doubt the most evil thing that ever hit any country. When children can fire their schools, assault their parents, attack people on the street, steel buses for a joy ride, young people who normally you would consider Sunday school children in any other country. When they can do that, who are you going to look to. You say, well the schools. What can they do in the schools? The school teacher, the school principal, they are not punish any of those children for fear that the kids will shoot, the kids will wreck the school. And so you say, "Well, how about the government?" "How about putting to being

caught." The court is absolutely a fallacy. Unless you are very poor, have no friends, the court will not do anything to make your case. How many times, even today, do you read of children committing a murder, who committed some crime, burning the school down and they say, "We do not publish the name of that child." Why? Why isn't the parent made responsible for it? Why do I, my biggest grouch that I have in this country, I have one grouch. Since I have been here I have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on school taxes only to learn the kids burned this school down, the kids burned that school down. Alright, if I could talk to my children and tell them how bad it was or anything of that sort, it would be a little bit of appeasement for me. But I have no children. I never will have any children. I never had any use for an American school. Why should I be penalized for other people's children?

DODSON: Is there anything that has particularly impressed you since you've been in the valley that you'd like to remark about? You mentioned Bullock's, is there anything else or any antidotes you can think of that you feel should be passed on to the future?

PRESCOTT: Well, as far as the valley itself is concerned, it has one very big factor that is against it. And that

is this perpetual red flag that we get in the press scaring people about possible earthquakes. First of all, it's bad for real estate, it's bad for residential places being built. It's also bad for the fact that they are building high rises on top of the very place that they tell you it's going to drop. And then they tell you that "Oh, the engineers have taken care of all the conditions that could be expected in an earthquake of a 7 magnitude." And yet, what kind of news do we get of high rise buildings in places where there is no Andrew's fault, where there is no earthquake situation anticipated, where there isn't an expected change in ground and yet they go ahead and develop. As you read in the papers even now of the fact that they are selling residences, selling land and selling all kinds of property, which you actually cannot get insured for. Why? Because in the next page of the paper they will tell you about the possibility of the great quake. It's the contradictory fact that makes it so unsatisfactory when you think of the valley as a beautiful place. There is no more beautiful place than the San Fernando Valley. It has the mountains, it has the snow. It has every aspect of any place you may want to go on the continent. I have noticed that there is no better place than the San Fernando Valley if they would stop knocking it.

DODSON: I wonder if you would tell us the names of those radio programs you produced. I think we should have that on record.

PRESCOTT: Oh my major product. My big pigheadedness in going and taking on a bet. I really let myself in for that. On a bet I said that I would produce 52 original plays in 52 weeks, out of spite more than anything else and the only person that really got hurt was myself because I had to do all the work. But we did produce a series of plays that were well accepted especially by the British people here in this country that possibly had it under the title of the British players. It was a good result. And it was enjoyable while it went on and it kept a crowd of people together. But as I say, it was a lot of work and if you took a list of the 52 names of the 52 plays, it would look like somebody was writing a mad script because the titles colored every conceivable situation. We used Egypt, we used the Orient, we used comedy. Every one was different. But at the end of the 52 weeks, much to a lot of people's regret I called my bet off. I went back later on with a serial called "Harry and Kitty." It was a comedy. It was funny, even I say it myself but it just went to show what two people can do if they're up against a proposition of relying on other people. My wife a

dramatic and character artist of pretty good standard played five women characters in that serial and I played the other five male characters without very few people being aware of the fact that we had no cast. But times past, politics ruled and we came off the air and I think I'd had enough so I went into producing a single film which in itself was very controversial but it happened to be taken entirely in one of the them legitimate nudist camps above Elsinore. It was a pretty film. It was not sexy but it had a lot of flesh in it. But in spite of police, in spite of censors, we played for six weeks at the old Criterion Theater that no longer exists on 1st Street in Los Angeles.

DODSON: Could you give us the name of that picture and the year that it was produced?

PRESCOTT: The picture itself was called "Unashamed," a drama in a nudist camp. And that was produced at a guessable date at least 19 years ago. That picture is still accepted and I have on one occasion seen it on display at the movie theater at the corner of Cahuenga and Hollywood Blvd. That's the last time I saw that picture. I went in with my wife to see it and I was after all those years very well pleased with it.

DODSON: Can you tell us the time when your radio series were produced. At what years they were broadcasted?

PRESCOTT: How digging back into the past...now let me see...the first of the radio scripts went on in about 1945. And we played through until about 1947. Most of the time at the old KMPC studio which is now located on Sunset Blvd. It use to be at the old United Artist Studios up in Hollywood.

DODSON: You told us a very interesting little story before we began recording this about how the titles for your 52 plays were selected and how you wrote the play that fit the title.

PRESCOTT: Well, that was perfectly true. And that is really a real epic of picking things out of the air because we had no idea of what play, of what title or anything about the play that we were going to put on the following week. But the end of the play that we were actually working on I would ask my cast, "Now give me some catchy words. Give some two or three words that would make a fair title." And we would go into a huddle as to what we should use and they'd come up with something or I'd think myself of something and then we would announce on the air that next week they should listen to the British Players when they would

produce a play called, then we would use those two or three words we'd picked out without any story, without anything or any knowledge of what it was going to be and then before the next week I would produce a script using those few words as the gist of the whole play. And in every case we came out trumps although some of the titles were pretty as they say screwy.

DODSON: I think that would be very interesting to people later to listen to hear how you produced those. How you got your inspiration from the titles. I think most people assume the story is written first and then the title picked.

PRESCOTT: No, no in this case we were really blank. And I must admit that on some of the very latest productions that we did up until Wednesday I had no idea what I was going to do with those three or four words before I got my script.

TAPE #2 - SIDE 2

PRESCOTT: It is not the usual thing to expect any logical description of happenings and events that had taken place in over 80 years of life. Actually the passage of years is shared by many. Even though each life will present a different picture. What you have asked of me has left me the thoughts that you are hoping I have events in my life that have an interest point or maybe it is a local memory and changes you may be personally interested in as those that I have seen. Of myself, I am one of those listed as a silent screen star. One of the first films I appeared in was in London, England in 1919. This was on my return from five years of active service in the first World War. Actually a film in production in those early days would be considered a comedy today. Exterior shooting was controlled by the antics of the sun. Men with large framed aluminum reflectors dodged hither and yonder trying to direct the sun's rays into the shooting area. The old time camera was a crank-handled proposition controlled by the cameraman's mental conditions. Sound was of no merit in the productions and a good lip-reader viewing the finished products could easily read the actor's comments upon the ?legitity of the cameraman's boss, etc. To look around the set it was easy to identify

different members of the crew. The producer always wore leather-sided riding britches, high-riding boots and carried a riding whip in his hands. The cameraman, probably the same in his dress, but he wore his cap backwards. Some pretty films were even produced under these conditions. In 1920 Sir Thomas Lipton invited Commodore Jay Stewart Blackton to visit England. The suggestion being the English film industry needed a big boost to make it worthwhile. Commodore Blackton is actually one of the pioneers of the movie industry. Mrs. Brocksmith and Blackton formed the Vidagraph Company of Brooklyn, this being the largest film company then existing. With my contact to Sir Thomas Lipton an introduction was arranged for my wife, later known as Elsie Prescott, the woman with forty faces. Blackton was happy to include her in her cast and she worked on the two colored films he produced. These were the first colored films made in England. One was a glorious adventure starring Victor McClagdon and Lady Diana Manners. The other "The Gypsy Cavalier" starring George S. Carpenter, the boxer. After these productions Tommy as we know him had to return to the USA. He gave us instructions as to what we should do and advised us to eventually come to the Vidagraph in Brooklyn. It too was several years before we finally reached Brooklyn. True to his word, Blackton took us

into the cast and one week after landing we were included in the black and white film called "On the Banks of the Warbash" and starring Mary Carl of over hill fame. About five years past during which I cut away from the acting profession and became an underwriter for the now defunct United States Casualty Company. Times and conditions changed and we headed for California. The Vidagraph Company had already left Brooklyn and settled in Hollywood and once more we were with Blackton. Through the following years I wrote and produced 52 half hour original plays over the old KMPC Radio Station. I also wrote and worked on the first dramatic nudist film that ran for six weeks at the Criterion Theater in Los Angeles. Now that I have spent nearly half a century in Sherman Oaks, it is quite amazing to look around and remember things as they use to be. Woodman, below Riverside Drive was mostly farm land. Walking down towards the mountains the acres of ripening squash filled the landscape. Where Bullock's is now was a huge grass meadow with a high hill on the westside. The McKinley School for Boys was situated on the crest of the hill and in season the boys from the school came over to our orchard to pick apples, peaches, pairs and walnuts for the school's use. Long gone are the eucalyptus trees that lined both sides of Woodman Avenue just below

Riverside Drive. The Los Angeles River was still river with rushes and bushes lining its banks. One or two swimming holes were favorite places for small boys and dogs. Between Moorpark and Valleyheart Drive was several small auto drive-ins and the Baptist church. In the rear of these there was an area of trees and bushes in which a few deer managed to exist. At this point all of this has long since passed away. Even though it is only a memory that recalls them. Today those locations that we accept as Sherman Oaks and Woodman Avenue are still in the throws of additional changes. Changes that within a very small passage of time will again have the location show a completely new series of habitations and stores and also more and more automobile business than we have at the present time. It is strange that when one thinks back of events in life that took days, months or years to live through, they are relived in a matter of minutes. Many experiences fearful and painful are almost forgotten. Yet one word will trigger the memories to a full recollection of the occasion when the event took place. Nothing stands still, even buildings. And tomorrow where originally a small single house stood, the frameworks of a high rise building are accepted without comments. As is visible when one stands on the corner of Woodman Avenue and Riverside Drive.

DODSON: This tape was pre-recorded by Captain Percival Prescott Richardson. The date of his recording is March 8, 1977. A second tape accompanies this one was the result of an interview conducted with Captain Prescott Richardson by Dr. James L. Dodson, Curator of the Los Angeles Valley College Historical Museum and by Miss Melanie Rothschild, a former student of Dr. Dodson's and now a student at UCLA. The date of the interview is also March 8, 1977. There are some other materials on this tape which Captain Prescott Richardson had recorded at some past time. They are not, however, relevant to the situation in the San Fernando Valley.

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